Vol. 54 No. 3 Dec. 2024

# TRANSPORTER

Governor **Phil Murphy** Lt. Governor **Tahesha Way** NJDOT Commissioner **Fran O'Connor**

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## Turning Tragedy into Triumph

*by Howard Gensler*

On November 7 in South Jersey, a poignant lesson was taught about persevering in the face of a great, personal loss.

On that sunny morning in Bellmawr, NJDOT, in partnership with the John R. Elliott HERO Campaign hosted the dedication ceremony of the Ensign John R. Elliott I-295 and Route 42 Memorial Interchange, and the unveiling of two new HERO Campaign police cars to spread the message about the dangers of drunk driving and to promote the use of designated drivers.

On July 22, 2000, Ensign Elliott was just 22 years old and a recent graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, when he was tragically killed in a head on collision with a drunk driver. He was driving home on Route 40, an undivided two-lane highway, to attend his mother's birthday celebration. To help ensure other families don't suffer a similar loss, the Elliott family – parents Bill and Muriel and sister Jennifer – launched the HERO Campaign to memorialize John's life and spread an important message: Be a HERO. Be a Designated Driver.

Twenty-four years later, more than 20 New Jersey police departments have colorfully wrapped cruisers with the HERO Campaign's logo and message, and those cars lined the November 7 ceremony. Even the Annapolis Police Department brought a wrapped HERO car all the way from Maryland to support the Elliott family.

The event began with a welcome from NJDOT Commissioner Fran O'Connor, followed by the presentation of colors by the Naval Support Activity Honor Guard of Lakehurst, New Jersey. The National Anthem was sung by John Elliott's nieces Anna and Nora Adamchak, who also handed out delicious, homemade HERO chocolate chip cookies made by John's mother. Military Chaplain Lieutenant Commander Chad Haan gave the invocation.

Commissioner O'Connor then spoke glowingly about the Elliott family and how they turned their pain into purpose. "They did something extraordinary," Commissioner O'Connor said, "and the message and reach of the HERO Campaign is so critical."

**Continued on page 2**

State Senator Vince Polistina, said that if the I-295/Route 42 Interchange had been around in 2000, "John Elliott would never have been on Route 40 and would be alive today." He credited the Elliotts for taking the HERO Campaign national and stressed, "Do not get behind the wheel if you are impaired or with anyone else who is impaired."

Assemblyman Bill Moen spoke of John Elliott's qualities as a naval officer, an American and a New Jerseyan. He urged drivers to notice the dedication sign and use it "as a reminder to make the right decision."

Egg Harbor Township Chief of Police Fred Spano cited John Elliott as a legitimate hometown hero and praised his family for the work they'd done over the years and how supportive they've been to the police of New Jersey. Commissioner O'Connor, serving as Master of Ceremonies, then invited John and Muriel, as well as representatives from the Lawerance and Lower Township police departments, to unveil the latest additions to the HERO Campaign fleet.

In 2001, The Elliotts lobbied New Jersey's State Government to pass "John's Law," which requires police to impound cars for 12 hours following a DUI arrest to prevent offenders from driving while still impaired. In the intervening years, they've brought the HERO Campaign's message to schools, universities and bars and teamed with professional sports teams to get the word out. More than 150,000 motorists nationwide have signed the campaign's Designated Driver Pledge, and that number is fitting – more than 150,000 drivers will pass through the Ensign John R. Elliott Memorial Interchange, also known as "Missing Moves" – every single day.

John's father, Bill, said his son would be proud of all the work the HERO Campaign has done to save lives, "but he wouldn't want to be getting so much attention." He also said he saw the sign dedication as a day to re-dedicate himself to the cause, to do even more. His daughter, Jenny, and his granddaughters, Anna and Nora, then unveiled the dedication sign, before the ceremony was ended with the retirement of colors.

Commissioner O'Connor left the audience with these wise words: "Next time you are planning a night out, be a HERO for someone."

**Want to know more?**

Watch on *ABC*: A Road To Remember: Interchange in New Jersey honors fallen Navy graduate - YouTube

Read on *NJ 101.5*: NJ highway interchange dedicated to drunk driving victim

Read on *City Pulse*: A Legacy of Service and Safety: New Jersey Honors Ensign John R. Elliott with Memorial Interchange

Read on *Press of Atlantic City*: Highway named after U.S. Naval officer killed by DWI driver

Watch on *Shore Loal Newsmagazine*: I-295 & Route 42 Memorial Interchange Dedication in memory of Naval Officer Ensign John R. Elliott. - YouTube

# Meet the Executive Leadership Team

## Profile #2

**Parth Oza** NJDOT

Assistant Commissioner of Capital Program Management

**Years of Service:** 11

**First Position at NJDOT:** Civil Engineer Trainee

**What advice have you received from a mentor that you would or have pass(ed) down to a colleague?**
Business is all about relationships.

**What is your favorite part about working for NJDOT?**
The ability to work with a dedicated team of caring employees who are committed to delivering a robust infrastructure network for the entire State. Doing good for the PEOPLE.

**What's your favorite way to unwind after a busy week?**
*Sitting on the couch and entertaining my seven-month-old daughter.*

**What's your favorite thing about New Jersey?**
The cultural and geographic diversity across the State.

**What's your go-to karaoke song?**
You have to go karaok'ing with me to find out.

**Over the next few months, you will have an opportunity to get to know our Senior Staff in this new feature of the *Transporter***

# ‘Tis the Season of Service

*By Lizzy Galamba*

Between October and February, more than 20 holidays will be celebrated worldwide. Diwali, el Dia de los Muertos, and Thanksgiving have already passed this holiday season, but we can still look forward to:

**Christmas** – December 25, 2024

**Hanukkah** – December 25, 2024 through January 2, 2025

**Kwanza** – December 26, 2024 through January 1, 2025

**New Year’s Day** – January 1, 2025

**Three Kings Day, or Epiphany** – January 6, 2025

**Lunar New Year** – January 29, 2025

At their core, Winter Holidays are about community, regardless of tradition or culture. They are a time to celebrate your loved ones and reflect on all you have, and in that reflection, we are often reminded of those who are less fortunate than us. However, when we turn this thought into action, the holiday season can be a fulfilling time to give back, pay it forward, and serve your community.

“I believe in helping out the community,” Norbert Teufel, Principal Engineer, Finance Unit and veteran contributor to the Charitable Campaign, said. “I’m a regular in the United Way of Greater Mercer County, because that is our location here, and I got irritated by something that happened to the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen. So, I always make it a point to contribute to them, too. I also found out that Wawa, when their food runs low, they send it to a couple of food banks. So, I’m happy to be a Wawa customer.”

The New Jersey Charitable Campaign provides the perfect opportunity for state employees to expand their service. Since the start of Fiscal Year 2024 in July 2023, under the stewardship of NJDOT’s Division of Capital Program Management (CPM), the Department’s contributions to the Charitable Campaign have been record breaking. Last year, NJDOT received the Campaign Chairpersons Award in recognition of our dedication to increasing both donations and participation. Deservedly, Certificates of Appreciation were awarded to Lisa Zacchino, Danielle King, and Danielle Scannon for their leadership.

“As Campaign Coordinators for the past two years, we were able to make sure employees have the chance to connect with a cause they care about through the program, and by hosting various events, we were able to raise additional funds for our Campaign efforts,” Zacchino and King said in a joint statement. “Being a coordinator is such an important role to the success of DOT’s Charitable Campaign, and we would like to thank CPM’s Assistant Commissioner Parth Oza, senior directors, and directors for their support and contributions.”

From hosting bake sales and pretzel sales to organizing food truck events and the annual charity fair to selling “stress cones,” NJDOT contributed $32,519 to the NJ Charitable Campaign in FY24 with Zacchino, King and Scannon steering the ship. Five months into FY25, NJDOT has raised $15,187 following the bake sale and Charitable Campaign Fair held on November 20 – just less than half (44.5 percent) towards our $34,145 goal. This figure is expected to grow following the Virtual Charitable Campaign Fair on December 3, a soft pretzel sale on December 4, and the month-long sale of NJDOT Stress Cones throughout December – a great gift for your favorite colleague!

"Charity fairs, like this, are important not only for the community to get to know us, but also to offer our services, which a lot of people don't know are available. Our services are completely free, and sometimes they are affected by grants we don't get. Contact supports survivors and loved ones that are affected by sexual assault and violence. We offer free therapy, and we do accompaniments to hospitals, courts and police departments. We are going to be there as an emotional support, and we also have a hotline, which is 24/7, if someone just wants to talk or know what steps they want to take next."

*– Alejandra Vazquez, Contact of Burlington County*

"I think the easiest way for nonprofits to really help the causes that they are supporting is through financial funding, through donations. For UNICEF, it's really helpful, because when folks donate unrestricted, it's flexible funding that helps us get those dollars to where they're needed most. We have staff on the ground in over 190 countries, and the ability to receive donations helps us to channel those resource. Say there is an emergency in another country overseas, we can get them the dollars they need to buy supplies, deliver and distribute to people who are in need."

*– Shannen Gordon, UNICEF USA*

"When you make a donation to the Animal Welfare Association, you are donating directly to the care of homeless animals. What those funds directly target is the transport of animals from high kill areas. It also pays for medical treatments: spaying, neutering, vaccinating, and any extenuating medical conditions that animals may have. Those funds contribute directly to supporting the ongoing care of those animals. Even one dollar a paycheck, times 26 or 52 paychecks, is a huge impact for our organization. If you're talking fifty dollars a year that's 10 vaccines for a shelter pet. I like to put it into perspective and help people understand, it doesn't have to be thousands of dollars. Fifty dollars a year, a hundred dollars a year makes a drastic impact to our mission and our ability to care for and support animals."

*– Lauren Donaldson, Animal Welfare Association*

"Nonprofits like Arc Mercer depend on a lot of donations to drive our mission forward and provide services for individuals with special needs. Every donation, big or small, makes a huge impact. A big issue in the special needs community, especially for adults, is that they don't have their own transportation. They can't provide their own rides from place to place, and it is super important for them to be independent and to have a career, have a job and be able to go and do the things that they want to do. We have partnered with DOT to be able to provide transportation to get from place to place, and another thing that we do is our janitorial department is here to clean the building."

*– Sam Stolz, Arc Mercer*

TRANSPORTER

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# News & Notes

News & Notes is a collection of employee awards, retirements, service anniversaries and other shareable and NJDOT pride-producing news.

## Diwali Celebration October 24

# Managing S.A.D. for a Happier Holiday Season

*By Lizzy Galamba*

Difficulty sleeping or getting out of bed, intensified cravings, trouble focusing on work, losing interest in what brings you joy – symptoms that may point to seasonal depression, or seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Finding ways to manage these symptoms can reduce stress, make for a more productive winter, create a safer work environment, and leads to a happier, healthier holiday season.

The New Jersey Civil Service Commission's Employee Advisory Service (EAS) recommends that employees invest their time into these four focus areas:

1. **Maintain a Positive Attitude** – A positive outlook improves your health by boosting your immune system, your relationships by promoting positive interactions, and your enjoyment of life. One way to maintain positivity is to practice changing negative thoughts into positive ones. Refrain from dwelling on negativity and reframe it into something constructive.
2. **Keep Your Life in Balance** – Don't confuse activity for productivity. Overworking yourself won't always result in positive outcomes and can even lead to burnout. Intentionally make time for yourself every day to relax or have fun. Pacing yourself and effectively managing your time will help you find moments for self-care. Set realistic, day-to-day goals that can help you stay focused, while keeping you from overcommitting yourself and overwhelming your schedule. You don't have to say yes to everything.

3. **Focus on Relationships** – Make it a point to spend time with the people who matter to you, but know it is ok to say no to extra activities that may cause or increase unnecessary stress. Remember: it's not what you say, it is how you say. Put your best foot forward in every interaction – be present, listen well, lead with kindness.
4. **Practice Self-Care** – Invest your time in the people and things that bring you joy. Carve out time each day to invest in physical and mental exercise – meditation, journaling, reading; making sure to get plenty of sleep each night to combat fatigue. Avoid overindulging, such as overeating and overspending – things that may bring you immediate satisfaction but can generate later feelings of guilt or regret. Intentionally focus on things that are meaningful to you: give back by volunteering or donating. Stay connected to your support system by proactively spending time with people who encourage your health and well-being.

If you are interested in learning more about these focus areas and combatting seasonal depression, consider participating in the EAS **"Transitioning into the New Year"** webinar, which will be held via Zoom on Thursday, December 19, from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m.

**Click Here to Register**

**Remember:** Help is at your fingertips. If you or your dependents find yourselves needing extra support in navigating seasonal or holiday depression this year, EAS can help!
**For Emergency Mental Health Services, call 1-866-327-9133** and press 1 to speak to a Mental Health Specialist 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Email Eas_Help@csc.nj.gov to schedule a free, confidential appointment to speak with a counselor.

## AASHTO Disaster Response and Mutual Aid Workshop November 12 - 13

*By Lizzy Galamba*

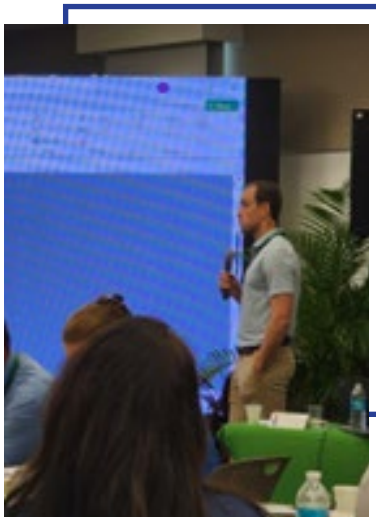
NJDOT's very own Doug Solazzo, Section Chief of Finance and Claims, Operations, traveled to the sunny shores of San Juan, Puerto Rico to represent the Department at the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Disaster Response and Mutual Aid Workshop. The two-day workshop, held on Tuesday, November 12 and Wednesday, November 13, brought together transportation leaders from across the country to discuss and prepare for emergency response in the wake of a natural disaster or extreme weather event.

As we come out of Hurricane Season, it is time to reflect on the impact Hurricanes Helene and Milton had on our neighbors in the South, primarily in Florida, Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina; remember the lives lost; and plan for future events. Transportation officials from State Transportation Departments, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) discussed potential resources and support capabilities pertaining to mutual aid agreements, focusing on the best management of shared federal funds and resources.

"Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), with support from National Emergency Management Association (NEMA), provides states with the legal capability to mitigate the federal disaster response system," Solazzo said. "Collaborating with other states during times of crisis has a legal platform, which helps provide support through these compacts. Interstate collaboration addresses resource deficiencies by ensuring maximum use of all available resources across the country, member states and territories."

Of these presentations, Solazzo led a short demonstration on how to fill out a Mission Ready Package (MRP) form through NEMA.

"Through NEMA, EMAC gives states the ability to request cost-effective relief from member states, during times of crisis," Solazzo said. "NEMA administers the MRPs, which are standardized packages that can be used for a variety of sector-specific needs and different magnitudes of disasters, to expedite mutual aid assistance."



Solazzo's demonstration mimicked a group exercise performed during the workshop, in which his group was given the role of an assisting state, responding to Structural and Geotech/Landslide Damage. "We filled out the MRP detailing all resources we would need as the responding state to get boots on the ground," Solazzo said. This included estimating costs for requirements of the assisting state.

"Puerto Rico has had difficult natural disasters as of late, including multiple hurricanes and an earthquake," Solazzo said. "The Departmento de Transportacion y Obras Publicas (DTOP) representatives had many stories to share about the challenges they have faced throughout these disasters, and how MRPs can be helpful in expediting interstate support. Other states also shared their recent disaster experiences during the facilitated discussions and started an important conversation, which AASHTO plans to carry forward."

These collaborative and open discussions represent the true unity of America's Transportation Industry, especially in the face of disaster – an industry committed to creating lifelong, resilient infrastructure that will serve generations to come, despite changing climate conditions.

NJDOT is no stranger to disaster response and is always ready to answer the call to action. In December 2022, NJDOT's Winter Operation Crews mobilized in response to a deadly snowstorm in Buffalo, New York, which left thousands of residents in isolation, after 56 inches of snow fell over a five-day period. What should have been a joyful holiday season turned into tragedy, after prolonged whiteout conditions and freezing temperatures claimed 41 lives in Buffalo. Nevertheless, NJDOT crews left their loved ones and volunteered their time to take the six-hour trip to assist our neighbors in New York and our partners at the New York State DOT, as if it were their own communities affected.

More recently, in July 2023, a landslide occurred in Knowlton, Warren County, following continuous, torrential rainfall. Dirt and debris covered Route 46, blocking the roadway and threatening nearby, residential properties. In just 12 days, NJDOT Operation Crews were able to clean up and reopen the roadway, before finding a permanent fix to stabilize the area with the intent of preventing future landslides. To learn more about NJDOT's emergency response to the Route 46 Landslide, watch our YouTube video: [Rt 46 Landslide Cleanup - YouTube.]

Please try to stay home during extreme weather conditions. If you must drive, remember: Turn around, don't drown! Never drive over downed wires, and keep extra blankets, non-perishable food items and water in your car, in case of a break down or large traffic volumes.

# NJDOT at the New Jersey League of Municipalities November 19 – 21

*By Lizzy Galamba*

Sitting behind NJDOT's booth on the first day of the 109th New Jersey State League of Municipalities (NJLM) Annual Conference was Kim Nance, Regional Manager – Region South, Office of Government and Community Relations (OCR) and NJLM veteran. For the past 15 years, she's sat behind the booth, with a bright, warm smile, ready to greet conference goers, field questions, and make connections with the 564 municipalities making up the League. She was later joined by League first timers: Jesus Alcazar, Division Director; Alexis Devre, Assistant Regional Coordinator – Region North; and Nameera Hoque, Assistant Regional Coordinator – Region South from OCR.

"The NJ League of Municipalities gave our staff an opportunity to meet face-to-face with local officials," Devre said.

She continued: "These interactions help us tremendously when communicating with them going forward. We often correspond through emails, as virtual meetings have become an option for the workforce since COVID-19. Meeting someone in person can help strengthen communication and a better understanding of our role in the NJDOT."

OCR is the face of the Department, they work with the public – constituents, local businesses and elected officials – to communicate construction work, coordinate Public Information Centers, answer questions and address complaints. Just to name a few responsibilities.

"Communication with the public is necessary to ensure a functional and well-lived community," Hoque said. "If NJDOT's goal is ultimately the safety and well-being of the public, it is our duty to communicate with them to understand their needs."

Next to OCR's booth, NJDOT's Local Aid Resource Center was set-up with Veronica Murphy, Director of Community Development; Kyle Skala, Manager, Local Aid Division Office; Komila Pandit, Manager of District 3; Alyssa Adams, Program Specialist; and Aidan Gillespie, Program Specialist there to answer questions about project planning, grant applications, project delivery, guidance through the federal process, and much more.

On the second day of the Conference, Commissioner Fran O'Connor, Chief of Staff Chris Scales, Assistant Commissioner of Local Resources and Community Development Laine Rankin, and Director of the Bureau of Traffic Engineering Jamie Oplinger participated in the Commissioner's Roundtable Panel to discuss the ways in which NJDOT supports New Jersey communities. They answered questions on topics ranging from the ALICE Moonshot Program, quick-fix projects, pedestrian and bike safety, grant applications and awards, safety implementation, to dredging.

Participating in events, like the NJLM Conference, connects the Department with the people that matter most: our customers – the people who rely on New Jersey's infrastructure to get them safely to their jobs, their families, their doctor's appointments their beach vacations.

"Doing this job, you can make a difference in people's lives for the better by understanding their community and expressing it internally, so that what we do at NJDOT can suit their needs," Hoque said.

With another successful conference in the books, Devre and Hoque look forward to returning next year.

"I am looking forward to next year's League and will plan to continue participating in these types of events. As we gain experience in our roles, we will be more familiar with local officials. I am looking forward to seeing them in the future," Devre said.

Similar sentiments were shared by Hoque: "I am eager to attend the League, as well as other events, in the coming years, to continue to provide a positive impression for NJDOT as well as connect with more local officials to try to be as involved with community affairs as I can."

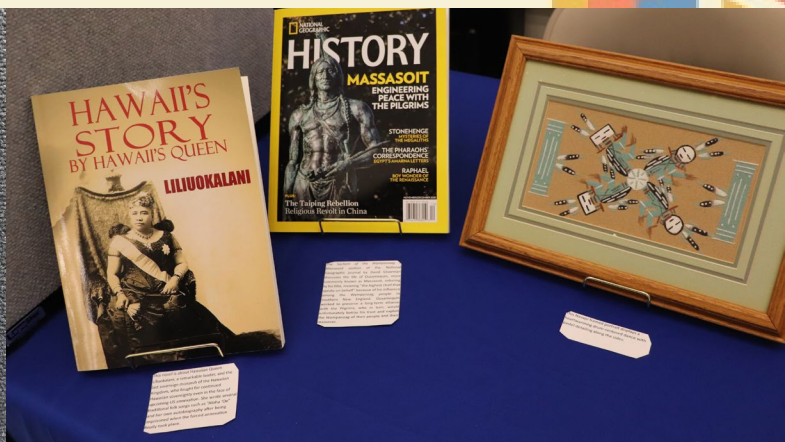
# Native American Heritage Month Exhibit November 25 - 26

*By Lizzy Galamba*

November is National American Indian Heritage Month. To celebrate the rich, diverse culture of Native Americans, NJDOT's Division of Civil Rights and Affirmative Action hosted an exhibit on Monday, November 25 and Tuesday, November 26. The exhibit, which displayed Native art – pottery, textiles and carvings; maps of Native land; and Native American media – books, movies, and magazines; is the first of its kind. According to Sarah Ekenezar, with Civil Rights and Affirmative Action, past acknowledgements of Native American Heritage Month included messages posted to the Intranet with some information on resources to seek, books to read, and recommended places to visit. "This year is actually our first time having physical exhibits and Native American objects presented in this way," Ekenezar said.

Katie Heisler, who sat alongside Ekenezar at the exhibit, said that cultural celebrations in a department as diverse as NJDOT are important "because we can include staff and employees who are Native American and celebrate their culture by bringing awareness to different things that have happened in history and how we have established different states in the country through their history." Simply put, Native American History is American History, Ekenezar said.

"I hope that people are able to understand just how diverse Native Americans are," Ekenezar said, explaining her vision of the exhibit's impact. "I think people tend to have a narrow idea of who Native Americans are, but this exhibit will explain that it's not just the Continental U.S. There are also Alaskan Natives, Hawaiian Natives. I really hope that this variety of books, the DVD, the physical artifacts, and the maps that portray the loss on Indian Country throughout U.S. History really paints a bigger picture of just how encompassing Native American History is in the U.S."



## Announcements

# NJDOT November Retirements

*Thank You for your Service*

*38 Years of Service*
**William Matthews**

*24 Years of Service*
**Miriam Torres**

*22 Years of Service*
**Anthony Ricciardi**

# NJDOT Holiday Parties

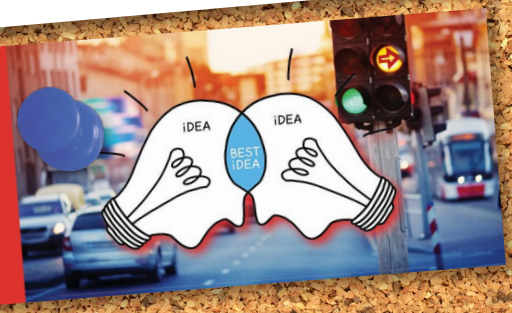
**December 10 at 10am**
**Region South**

**December 16 at 10am**
**Region North**

**December 19 at 9:30am**
**Headquarters**

BUREAU OF RESEARCH

**GOT IDEAS?**




**IDEAS CAN BE SUBMITTED IN 6 CAMPAIGN AREAS**

1. Capital Improvement & Infrastructure
2. Mobility & Operations
3. Multimodal
4. Organizational Support
5. Planning & Environment
6. Safety Management

**Click Here for More Info**

# NJDOT'S 11TH ANNUAL HOLIDAY SEASON OF SERVICE FOOD DRIVE

## Donations accepted through December 16

**DROP-OFF LOCATIONS**

- **EWING HEADQUARTERS:** E&O MOB + F&A LOBBIES
- **REGION NORTH:** MOUNT ARLINGTON LOBBY
- **REGION CENTRAL:** E&O, 4TH FLOOR
  **YARDS:** SAND HILL, LAKEWOOD, LAWRENCE, BEDMINSTER + FREEHOLD
- **REGION SOUTH:** CHERRY HILL LOBBY
- **TRAINING CENTER:** NEAR THE GUARD'S STATION

**POINT OF CONTACT**

- **EWING HEADQUARTERS:** MEG FRAMPTON + CHRIS YANDOLI 609-963-1434/1631
- **REGION NORTH:** ELYCE GRATALE 973-810-9073
- **REGION CENTRAL:** LAUREN LASKY 609-963-1284
- **REGION SOUTH:** LISA LAGGY + TIFFANY REYNOLDS 856-414-8537
- **TRAINING CENTER:** ERIC WALTERS 609-817-9452

**Thank you in advance for your generous donations!**

**ITEMS NEEDED**

**Nonperishable, unexpired, unopened food**

**Health/Sanitary products**

TOYS FOR TOTS®

## Please help us make a child's holiday a little more merry and bright this year!

**Drop off locations will be at the entrance of each headquarters.**

**Last day to donate is Friday, December 6th at 9am**

NJ DOT is hosting this toy drive in memory of David Kern.
David served as the Deputy Director of Procurement here at NJDOT for 19 years. He passed away unexpectedly in September 2022. Every year David, his wife Lisa, and son Nicholas held a Toys for Tots drive. This cause was very dear to his heart. Please help us to honor David's legacy with this annual collection.